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ABSTRACT

Written for those who have never written for a professional journal and for those who have had initial success in getting published, this fastback includes basic information about preparing a manuscript, suggestions that will help with acceptance by a journal, and a framework to design a writing program to help published writers achieve their writing goals. After an introduction, a discussion on why educators write, and advice on making time to write, sections of the fastback address getting started (choosing a topic, targeting an audience, beginning to write); matters of style; the right manuscript for the right journal (referred or research journals); the submission process (to query or not to query, submitting the manuscript); and "a few words about writing relationships" (writer-editor relationship, writer-mentor relationship, writer-collaborator relationship, and support groups). Contains 30 references. (RS)

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FASTBACK

PUBLISHER'S SAMPLE
NOT FOR RESALE

A Brief Guide to Writing for Professional Publication

Kenneth T. Henson

ED 429 304

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Kenneth T. Henson

Kenneth T. Henson is professor and dean of the College of Education at Eastern Kentucky University in Richmond, where he teaches a course in writing for publication. He also has conducted more than 200 workshops on writing for publication.

Henson has written more than 200 articles for a variety of journals, including seven articles on writing for the *Phi Delta Kappan*. His articles also have been featured in *The Writer* and *Writer's Digest*. One article, "Six Myths that Haunt Writers," was named as one of the top 100 articles in 1991 by *The Writer*.

Henson also is the author or co-author of more than 20 books. His recent books include *Methods and Strategies for Teaching in Secondary and Middle Schools* (3rd ed., Longman, 1996), *Teaching Today* (5th ed., Macmillan, 1997), *Educational Psychology for Effective Teaching* (Wadsworth, 1999), *Case Studies of Beginning Teaching* (2nd ed., Longman, 1994), *The Art of Writing for Publication* (Allyn & Bacon, 1995), and *Writing for Professional Publication: Keys to Academic and Business Success* (Allyn & Bacon, 1999).

In 1987 Henson wrote his first fastback for Phi Delta Kappa: 262 *Writing for Professional Publication*. He has held offices in Phi Delta Kappa chapters in the Southeast, Midwest, and Southwest.

Series Editor, Donovan R. Walling

A Brief Guide to Writing for Professional Publication

by
Kenneth T. Henson

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Introduction

The difference between successful writers and wannabes boils down to attitude. Wannabe writers find excuses for failure, such as fear of receiving an editor's rejection letter. They rationalize: "I don't write for journals because they are full of mediocre articles." But they do not take the next step of submitting a first-rate article, which might raise the quality of the "mediocre" journal.

Successful writers say to themselves, "I can succeed as a writer — and I will!" Positive attitudes — confidence and determination — when combined with a disciplined program of writing go a long way toward producing success.

This fastback is both for those who have never written for a professional journal and for those who have had initial success in getting published and want to continue that success. For the unpublished, I include basic information about preparing a manuscript and suggestions that will help them get it accepted by a journal. For those who already have been published, I provide a framework that can be used to design a writing program that will help them achieve their writing goals and accelerate their rate of success.

Why Write?

Successful writers have specific reasons for writing, reasons that they understand, acknowledge, and can articulate. Educators who write also understand that professional publication may help them to attain their professional goals, including career advancement. Understanding why one writes is a means to developing a positive attitude and can provide self-motivation that engenders the energy, drive, and persistence necessary for publishing success.

Some educators say that they write because it helps them to clarify their own thinking. Writing forces them to organize their thoughts in logical and convincing ways so that they can communicate their ideas clearly to others.

Some educators write because they view sharing information and ideas as a professional responsibility. As they grow in the profession, they feel the urge to contribute to the larger dialogue, to share insights and research findings with local and distant colleagues.

Some educators write in order to communicate with a larger audience of colleagues. A major education journal such as the *Phi Delta Kappan*, with a circulation of

about 150,000, can serve as a powerful means of sharing professional knowledge and of gaining recognition for one's work.

And some educators write because professional publication is a necessary step toward career advancement. "Publish or perish" is alive and well on university campuses across the nation. One's publication list can be a factor in determining promotions, tenure, and merit pay. Once tenure has been achieved, publications still serve to maintain and enhance one's professional standing.

Most educators write for some combination of these and other reasons. Elementary and secondary teachers and administrators increasingly are turning to professional writing as a way to share "good news" about their schools and programs. Professional development schools and universities are teaming to conduct action research, which can be reported through the professional literature.*

In the final analysis, as my colleague Tom Buttery comments, "Writing for publication is exciting because it forces you to extend your skills and widen your insights while providing a sense of satisfaction that you have contributed to our professional knowledge base." Individuals who take professional writing seriously

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*Space will not permit a full discussion of action research writing in this fastback. However, interested readers may want to consult my chapter, "Teachers as Researchers," in *The Association of Teacher Educators Handbook on Research on Teacher Education*, 2nd ed., edited by John Sikula, Tom Buttery, and Edith Guyton. New York: Macmillan, 1996.

need to examine their personal reasons for doing so. Understanding these reasons will help to shape an effective writing program.

Making Time to Write

A question frequently asked at writing workshops and in courses on writing for publication is, "How do you find time to write?" The response of many successful writers is, "I don't *find* time for it. I just do it."

Despite the demands on their time, many successful writers understand that publishing is important (perhaps even essential) for their careers and conclude that they can ill afford *not* to write. It is not a matter of *finding* time; it is a matter of *making* time. Making time to write can mean making some sacrifices, such as not lingering over that second cup of coffee with colleagues in the lounge or not watching a mediocre TV program. Thus effective writers organize their activities in order to create time to write.

But how do they do it? That is the real question.

To create time to write, one first must set goals. Writing goals should be both immediate and long-term. For example, an immediate goal might be to complete a particular journal article by a certain date. A long-term goal might be to write a series of articles over a longer period. Both immediate and long-term goals need to be written down; that seems to make them more concrete

and psychologically compelling. Some successful writers go to the extent of writing down both daily and weekly writing goals, because this practice helps them make time to write. Being specific also extends to the writing goals themselves. The goals need to be stated in definite terms: "By Friday I will finish the manuscript," not "I'll try to be done soon."

All writers need to keep balance in mind, however. Like exercise programs and other activities that make demands on time and mental and physical resources, a writing program cannot be so aggressive that the writer risks becoming burned out. That would be counterproductive. Joggers need not give up jogging, and family responsibilities must not be neglected for the sake of writing. Thus the question often is asked, "When is the best time to write?"

Answers are as varied as human schedules and preferences. Finding a personal fit can best be accomplished through self-examination and trial and error. For example, some individuals need complete quiet in order to write well; others can function amid hubbub. "Morning people" may find a few quiet moments by rising slightly earlier than usual and taking advantage of the energy they feel before the day really gets under way. "Night people" often report that they do their best writing after dark — and after everyone else is in bed. Still other writers find time to write productively in the midst of a busy office or library.

Another factor is time devoted to writing at each sitting. Some writers maintain that they need at least two hours for a productive writing session. Time spent mentally

preparing and assembling materials makes a shorter period next to useless, perhaps even frustrating. One prolific writer I know compares writing to digging a well. Each writing session he digs a bit deeper, and he knows that in every writing session time must be spent climbing in and out of the well. Thus each session must accommodate getting into and out of the manuscript.

At the same time, few writers — except, perhaps, those who write for a living — find marathon writing sessions altogether satisfactory. Breaking most articles into smaller segments, shorter writing sessions, is generally more acceptable than trying to get an entire manuscript finished at one sitting, unless it is a very short article.

But writers have their own individual preferences and levels of comfort when it comes to writing. Those will vary according to the task, the season, and other factors. There is no right or wrong way to make time to write. The point is, somehow, just to do it.

Getting Started

In this section I discuss several starting points. Readers will quickly realize that a comprehensive guide to writing for publication cannot be achieved in the space of a fastback; there is just too much to cover. But I can provide some starting points and, later, a few tips that should prove helpful.

One starting point is assembling the right tools to begin writing. Time and tools go hand in hand, because having the right tools ready to use saves time which then can be devoted to writing. Again, personal preferences come into play.

Some writers are more comfortable sitting down to a pad and pencil or pen; others find a keyboard more to their liking. Some writers bounce back and forth between the two. In any case, having ready access to writing materials and devices is the first step. I already have touched on writing in solitude or amid a hubbub; those factors will determine where such materials and devices should be located.

Wherever one chooses to write, that location also should offer some standard resources. First among these is a dictionary. A comprehensive dictionary is not

only necessary for checking spellings and definitions but also for distinguishing nuances of word meaning and for clarifying matters of usage. A computer spell-checker cannot substitute for a good dictionary, though it can be a helpful supplement. Other standard resources that many writers would be loathe to do without include a thesaurus and a book of quotations.

Another resource is access to a library. For writers who do not write at a table in a busy reference library, the next best thing will be that library's reference desk phone number and, of course, a telephone. Reference librarians usually welcome a research challenge and can respond quickly to questions about volume numbers, the correct spelling of an author's name, or an accurate title or publisher.

For deeper questions a trip to the library may be productive, but many writers can now make a "virtual" trip by going online and using the facility of the Internet. But beware: Many Internet resources are filled with errors. And so double-checking information found online through a good library will be essential for some projects.

Speaking of computers again, most writers today view the computer in the same way that writers of prior generations viewed the typewriter. Computers surpass even the best "correcting" typewriters because of their advanced programming. Sentences and paragraphs can be moved, corrected, eliminated, or inserted with ease. Retyping has become a thing of the past. Thus the computer is a time-saver — or, more to the point, a time maker!

Computers also have changed the way manuscripts are treated by editors. Most journal editors today accept

manuscripts produced by computer printers (though the rare dot-matrix printout still is frowned on). Indeed, many editors request computer disks as well as "hard copy" manuscripts, and most editors do at least some editing of manuscripts on a computer screen, rather than on paper. More and more editors are willing to accept electronic submissions. My latest survey found that almost two-thirds of the editors (65.1%) will consider online submission.

Choosing a Topic

Let's not get too far ahead though. First, a writer needs a topic.

The best advice for all writers, particularly novices, is to choose a topic that they know well and care about. Classroom teachers and school administrators might look at their own jobs, things they do that someone else might find value in knowing about. A teacher might write about a successful class project in which students were highly motivated and from which they learned a great deal. A principal might write about a staff development program that was particularly successful.

Graduate students and college teachers who have conducted research have the makings of one or more professional articles ready to hand. Most theses and dissertations are not publishable outside academe per se, but they can be mined for articles, article series, and even books.

Some beginning writers make a mistake by choosing a topic that is popular. Perhaps they have seen numerous

articles in professional journals, read various viewpoints, and so desire to join the conversation. What they fail to realize is that by the time their manuscript is written, submitted, accepted, edited, and published, the conversation will be over. The writing and publishing process often takes a year or more, and editors are keenly aware of the passing time and its effect on topics. Writers, like editors, must learn to look ahead, to anticipate where a professional conversation may be a year or two in advance.

Of course, there are certain topics of perpetual interest. Some topics seem to come and go in cyclical patterns. Examples include gifted education, teacher evaluation, merit pay (or career ladders or similar notions), and censorship. Sometimes a specific event will generate new interest in an old topic. For example, the HIV/AIDS epidemic renewed interest in sex education for a time. And periodically reports from think tanks or government agencies will revive interest in this or that topic.

So, how can a writer identify topics that might be on the rise? The first piece of advice is that writers must be readers. They must read the professional journals and stay in touch with mass media in order to spot trends and emerging issues.

Second, they must follow legislation, both state and national (and local, if it pertains to education). A legislative mandate has been the starting point for many school programs.

Third, they must stay in touch with their professional organizations. In addition to the current journals of those associations, many professional journals announce themes for upcoming issues. And many organizations

sponsor conferences where thought-leaders may point the way to issues and topics to be discussed in future articles.

Targeting an Audience

As important as choosing a topic is identifying the intended audience for one's writing. Will the audience be teachers in general? School administrators? Parents? Or will the audience be more narrowly defined, such as curriculum directors? Elementary science teachers? Professors of education history?

Many journals in education are directed toward a specialized audience. Therefore, a writer must write with that audience in mind. One way to better understand that audience — and the kind of writing that the journal editor may be seeking — is to read several issues of the journal (or journals) to which the finished manuscript will be sent. Not only will this strategy aid in making a good choice of topic, but it also will give the writer a sense of the journal's article style, preferred article length, and so on. Knowing what a journal's editor has accepted in the past can help a writer tailor a manuscript to fit the editor's notion of acceptability.

Beginning to Write

Most writing begins as some form of mental activity or mental "writing." Some writers transfer this pre-writing to paper as doodles, sketches, notes, and so on. Over time — long or short, depending on the individual — ideas jell, a sense of organization emerges, and examples or analogies that will illustrate ideas come to mind.

Many writers commit their ideas to a written outline, but there is no standard for such an outline. Some are elaborate; others are simple. And some writers simply keep the outline in their head.

Mental "writing" is what helps many writers to launch a manuscript and, often, what keeps the writing flowing. But as often as not, fluidity is far from constant; writing can be a process of fits and starts, smooth and rough alternately. The important thing is to get going and to keep going.

The Opening Sentence. Skillful writers grab a reader's attention with the very first sentence. There are many ways to do this. One way is by asking a question that captures the theme of the manuscript and leads the reader to find out how the writer will answer it. For example, "What should a principal know about student rights?" tells the reader what the author will be dealing with in the rest of the article. A principal reading this sentence will likely respond, "This is a topic that affects me personally. What *should* I know about student rights?" And the principal will read on.

Another effective opening sentence is a bold and blunt statement. For example, "Teachers do not use research to improve instruction." This type of opening provokes a reaction. The reader may agree or disagree with the assertion. Either way, the reader is likely to want more information and will read the article.

The Opening Paragraph. Having caught a reader's attention with the opening sentence, the writer then needs to use the opening paragraph as an advance organizer. What should the reader expect from the rest of the arti-

cle? Educators, in particular, tend to be busy people. They want to know right away whether an article is going to hold information of value to them. Therefore, an effective paragraph will give them that information. It will have a single focus, and each sentence will advance the thought expressed in the opening sentence.

Perhaps it is easiest to see what I mean by reading two examples.

Draft #1

Under ordinary circumstances, by adequately utilizing their human resources and by administrating effectively to their teachers and counselors, secondary school principals can effectuate innovations that can lead to a maximizing of the academic gains of their students on standardized exams. Under certain circumstances, these increased student academic gains can result in establishing an improved image for their institution.

Following is the same idea expressed in a different way.

Draft #2

By involving their teachers and counselors, high school principals can help students perform better on standardized tests. Better performance, in turn, can improve a school's public image.

The second opening paragraph uses the blunt statement approach I suggested earlier. In the main, both paragraphs say the same thing. But the second paragraph is succinct. The reader cannot get lost in the writer's words and miss the point, which can happen in the first paragraph.

Matters of Style

I suggested earlier that the best way to learn what a journal editor wants is to read several issues of the journal. Another source of information will be the journal's style sheet or writer's guidelines.

One of the first considerations will be manuscript length. One can estimate an article's length in a journal simply by counting the actual number of words in several lines, calculating an average number of words per line, and then counting the number of lines in the printed article. Variations on this strategy are endless, and it is simply a matter of choosing the easiest method.

Acceptable manuscript length, whether extrapolated from the journal itself or found in the style sheet, will influence how a manuscript is composed, the extent of elaboration, the number of examples or graphic elements (charts, tables) that can be used, and so on.

A rule of thumb in creating a manuscript is that a standard, typed, double-spaced page will contain about 250 words. Computers have made it easy to manipulate this number, but it does not make sense to do so. If a style sheet says that 10-page manuscripts are the preferred length, the editor means that an acceptable manuscript

should be about 2,500 words long — not 3,500 words. Just because the computer can print 350 words on a page does not make it reasonable.

Style and Substance

Good writing has both style and substance. Substance is relatively easy to define, and its absence will be obvious. Style is a more elusive concept. It involves word choice, sentence length, abstraction, humor, the use of anecdotes and examples, and many other elements. Various topics lend themselves to various styles. A report of research findings, for example, reads very differently from a how-to article. Arguing the pros and cons of merit pay demands a different style from describing a school's successful science fair.

Education journals often have distinctive styles. And so, again, the best course is to do some research into the question of style by reading several issues of the journal, or journals, to which a manuscript will be submitted. Writing in a similar style to the style of the articles published by a journal will increase the likelihood of getting published in that journal.

In another sense, style can be thought of broadly as communicating with clarity and brevity. In their classic book, *The Elements of Style*, William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White comment:

> Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. (1979, p. 23)

These basic elements are relatively easy to achieve if writers pay close attention to their writing. Clarity is achieved mainly by using relatively short, direct sentences; by using familiar words; and by using clear examples to support generalizations. Brevity can be achieved by editing and revising to eliminate unnecessary elaboration and redundancies.

(Incidentally, dissertations and similar academic papers usually violate these principles of style. They are written to demonstrate a person's ability to do research and seldom are read by an audience beyond the members of their dissertation committee. Rarely are dissertations models of brevity. Indeed, dissertation writers often are forced to confront the lesson of brevity only when they are required to compose an abstract of their dissertation.)

Many successful writers do not initially concern themselves with matters of clarity and brevity. They rush to get everything on paper first. Then, during editing and reflection, they rewrite and revise to winnow out the unnecessary and to make the clearest sense of the necessary. A few writers have extraordinarily clear sense during initial writing and so revise very little. But they tend to be in the minority. Most writers need to edit extensively. They can tackle that chore alone, as many do; but they also can enlist the help of others. I will say more about this process in a moment.

Long-winded, mouth-filling phrases are the bane of otherwise good writing. I feel strongly enough about this point that I want to single out a few examples. The following are taken from my book, *Writing for Professional Publication: Keys to Academic and Business Success*

(1999). Every writer should try to replace as many as possible of the "bulky" phrases with the "concise" versions.

Bulky	Concise
until such time as	until
a high rate of speed	fast
on account of	because
on a daily basis	daily
in a hasty manner	hastily
in close proximity	near
in the event that	if
provides information	tells
in the majority of cases	usually
each and every one	each
has to do with	concerns
in spite of the fact that	although
at that point in time	then
at this point in time	now

I would hasten to say that it is possible to use such bulky phrases occasionally, but their overuse ruins good writing. Following is a sample paragraph that overuses bulky language. The paragraph that follows it is the edited version, in which the language has been "tightened" and unnecessary words have been removed.

First Draft

When the American public's anxiety is aroused by war, inflation, economic depression, civil unrest, or whatever, we Americans usually look for someone or something to blame, and that's good. Why? Because the one unfailing sign of a vital, healthy national climate is the American people's vigorous

desire to participate in criticism and give suggestions for reforms and refinements. Frequently, the easiest target to attack is the tax-supported neighborhood elementary and secondary schools.

Edited Version

When public anxiety is aroused, Americans usually look for someone or something to blame. That's good, because one sign of a healthy national climate is people's willingness to criticize and to suggest reforms and refinements. Frequently, the easiest target is the tax-supported neighborhood school.

Space does not permit a full review of stylistic considerations, but a few others merit at least a brief mention:

- Keep subjects and verbs close together.
- Keep modifiers (adjectives, adverbs) close to the words they modify.
- Keep pronouns close to their antecedents.
- Avoid passive voice; use active voice whenever possible.

Writers also need to be sensitive to gender-specific language. The generic use of the masculine pronoun is now regarded as old-fashioned (and politically incorrect). The same is true of any language that presumes a gender role without specific intent. Therefore, "policeman" should become "police officer," which presumes that both men and women can be employed in that role. "Mail carrier" instead of "mailman" and "flight attendant" instead of "stewardess" follow the same logic.

A number of writers and editors have experimented with how both sexes should be represented by pro-

nouns: "he/she," "s/he," or "he or she." The last form is preferred when a singular pronoun is absolutely necessary. However, the easiest way to avoid any such awkwardness is to use the plural form. For example, rather than writing, "Each teacher has his or her own way of handling discipline," one can write, "Teachers have their own ways of handling discipline."

Finally, education writing has been justly criticized for excessive use of jargon, sometimes referred to as "educationese" or "pedagese." Every discipline has its own technical vocabulary, which is understood by those in the discipline. Education is no exception. But there is a difference between specialized or technical vocabulary and gobbledygook. If technical terms are to be used, then the writer should define them at the outset as a matter of clarity. But all writers should eschew pretentious jargon and inflated language that serves no real purpose.

The Right Manuscript for the Right Journal

Several hundred journals in education are published in the United States. Most of them are directed to a specialized audience in terms of subject area, level of instruction, or job specialty. A few, such as the *Phi Delta Kappan*, are intended for a general audience of educators. Before writing, beginning writers should familiarize themselves with this wide variety of education journals. By spending time in the school district's professional library or a university library, they may discover journals previously unfamiliar to them, possible new "markets."

A word about "marketing": Even though most education writers are not paid for articles they submit to professional journals, the process of marketing a manuscript is much the same as if they were writing articles for the commercial magazine market. It will pay to be familiar with the education markets in order to enhance the likelihood of publication, regardless of remuneration (or its absence).

Even the best tailoring to a particular market segment of education journals cannot guarantee success. All writers — even the best, the most experienced, the

Pulitzer Prize winner — have been rejected, often many times over. Familiarity with the available markets will help a writer take the rejected manuscript, dust it off, polish it up, and resubmit it to another editor.

One approach that can increase a manuscript's marketability is to match the topic to a journal's announced theme. My workshop participants always perk up when I announce that they can increase their acceptance rate dramatically without doing any extra work. The key is writing for themed issues. Most disciplines have a large market for articles written to themes. My latest survey to editors found that almost one-third (31.4%) of the articles in the 50 journals surveyed are written to themes. On the average, editors of journals that publish both themed and general issues receive more than four times as many manuscripts for the general issues. This means that by finding out the journal's upcoming themes, one can write on a topic in which the editor has already announced an interest.

Refereed Journals

By definition, a refereed journal is one in which the manuscripts chosen for publication have been reviewed and approved by an independent group (committee, panel, editorial board) of experts. Many universities require or prefer that their faculty publish in refereed journals, because many refereed journals are viewed as more prestigious than nonrefereed journals. Peer review and approval, at least in theory, ensures that published manuscripts are the "best of the best." Some universities even

maintain a list of approved refereed journals and assign points to faculty who publish in these journals; the points are important to tenure and promotion reviews.

However, there are many prestigious nonrefereed journals, including the *Phi Delta Kappan*, whose eminence stems from the prudent judgment of their editors. The distinction between a refereed and nonrefereed journal is not as clear as some might think. Editors of refereed journals often cull out what they consider to be clearly inappropriate manuscripts, and the reviewers never see them. When reviewers disagree over a manuscript, the editor often makes the final decision. And, if the editor of a refereed journal solicits a manuscript from a prominent writer, it usually is published without any input from reviewers.

On the other hand, many editors of nonrefereed journals consult a network of experts for advice on manuscripts. Also, few editors work alone, and editorial staff members share manuscripts and reviews among themselves before making publication decisions. Furthermore, many editors working for nonrefereed journals have served (and may serve concurrently) as outside reviewers.

For most writers, the question of whether a journal is refereed or not is a small consideration. A more important question will be, What audience am I seeking? If the intended audience is secondary school principals, a good choice is the *NASSP Bulletin*, the principals association journal, which is nonrefereed. If the intended audience is teacher educators, a good choice would be *Action in Teacher Education*, which is refereed.

Another factor to consider is the circulation of the journal. Many refereed journals are highly specialized and have only a small circulation. If the aim is for the largest possible audience of readers, a larger circulation journal, whether refereed or not, will be a more appropriate choice.

Research Journals

A second specialized category is research journals. Research-oriented universities want their faculty members to be published in research journals. Such publications enhance the standing of the university, as well as the individual reputations of the writers. Consequently, most research journal articles are written by university professors — or aspiring professors. However, many writers can and should consider writing for research journals. Classroom and action research projects often produce noteworthy findings.

The market for research-based manuscripts is not limited to research journals. A survey conducted in 1996-97 revealed that 98% of the education journals surveyed carried some research articles. And a content analysis of more than 50 prominent education journals disclosed that nearly half (42%) of the articles in those journals reported some research.

The word *research* also can be interpreted in several ways. Academic research journals lay considerable stress on formal methodology and highly structured reportage. Other journals publish articles that focus on the implications of research for practitioners and are less

formally structured and less technical. Many journals publish summaries of research that pull together the results of several related studies.

For nonresearchers who want to engage in informal research, there are several useful strategies. For example, a questionnaire can be relatively unsophisticated and yet produce useful information. To cite personal experience, over several years I have periodically sent a questionnaire to editors of education journals in order to answer the questions most frequently asked by participants in my workshops on writing for publication. The questionnaires are not very sophisticated; but they successfully produce the answers needed, and that information has served as a basis for several articles.

The Submission Process

There are several steps to submitting a manuscript, beginning with deciding whether to submit it to a given journal. That decision can be assisted by sending a query letter.

To Query or Not to Query

The purpose of a query letter is to find out if an editor has any interest in the topic about which you have written or propose to write. Let me make a distinction. One strategy is to write the query letter in order to "test the water" for a topic about which one *intends* to write. If no editor takes the bait, there may be no good reason to write the manuscript. However, the editor should know whether the manuscript is finished or merely being contemplated.

The second strategy is to write a query letter in order to ascertain an editor's interest in a manuscript that already is finished and ready to send — or nearly so, at least. Using this strategy can save money that might otherwise be spent on sending manuscripts to editors who may not want even to review them.

Some editors prefer to see a complete manuscript, rather than a query. But many editors appreciate the query letter because they can turn aside unproductive topics or treatments without having to deal with the full manuscripts. They also can encourage topics they want to see and provide treatment pointers that can help a writer fine-tune a manuscript, which will increase its chances of acceptance.

Following is a typical query letter:

Thomas J. Buttery, Editor
American Middle School Education
East Carolina University
School of Education
Department of Elementary Education
154 Speight Building
Greenville, NC 27834

Dear Dr. Buttery:

Recent changes in school law will directly affect middle school administrators.

I have just completed an eight-page manuscript that reports on a study of these changes that was conducted at Eastern Kentucky University. And I provide examples of how middle school administrators should adjust school discipline codes in order to comply with the new laws.

If you believe this topic will be of interest to your journal readers, I can send you a copy of the manuscript immediately. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Kenneth T. Henson, Dean
College of Education

This sample illustrates a couple of basic principles. A query letter should be brief. This is a key factor. Editors are invariably busy and will not respond well to long-winded explanations. The letter should be tailored to the interests of the journal's readers. It should succinctly describe the contents of the manuscript (and its length, if the manuscript is finished). And it should say why the topic is important. Note that the query letter in this example does not summarize the manuscript; a summary would be useful only if the manuscript were very long, and then it might be included as a separate abstract.

Submitting the Manuscript

If the query letter produces a green light from an editor, or if the writer simply decides to send a manuscript "cold," the next step is one of packaging.

Appearance is important. A finished manuscript should be clean and error-free. All text, including footnotes and references, should be double-spaced. The print should be a standard size (usually 12-point) and a standard font (such as Times). Pages should have one-inch margins on all sides, and only one side of each sheet should contain printing.

Part of the market research that I alluded to earlier should include attention to technical details, such as footnote or reference styles. Consideration also should be given to whether the target journal uses subheads, charts, figures, tables, and so on — and, if so, in what style. Writers should note whether photos are encour-

aged or discouraged. If photos are to be included in the submission package, they should be prepared in accordance with the editor's instructions, writer's guidelines, or journal style sheet.

The submission package should contain the manuscript and related materials, a cover letter (similar in brevity and contents to the query letter), and a stamped, self-addressed return envelope.

Most editors acknowledge receipt of a manuscript within a few days. However, a decision on whether the manuscript is accepted for publication can take from a few weeks to several months. Waiting for a response can be frustrating, but writers should understand that reviewing a manuscript takes time. The manuscript must take its place in the queue of submissions an editor must tackle. And if the manuscript must be read by outside reviewers, then the review process will take even longer.

There is almost no reason to send any manuscript to more than one editor at a time. If multiple submissions are made, then the editors must be informed that others may be reviewing the manuscript at the same time they are reading it. However, many editors will give less consideration to a manuscript that is not "exclusively" theirs for consideration.

A Few Words About Writing Relationships

The popular view of writing is that it is a solitary process. But when a writer's fingers are not actually clutching a pen or resting on a keyboard, the writing process can be — often is — highly collaborative. Writers rely on librarians, research assistants, secretaries, even spouses to assist in the writing effort. Three relationships merit special consideration: the relationship between writer and editor, between writer and mentor, and between writer and collaborator.

The Writer-Editor Relationship

As I have just written about submitting a manuscript to an editor, I should say a word or two about the relationship between a writer and an editor. Beginning writers sometimes see editors as adversaries (especially after a rejection letter or two). In fact, quite the opposite is true. Editors often are wise counselors and good teachers.

First of all, a rejection letter may not be a comment on the quality of a manuscript. Often a rejection may mean simply that the journal already has enough man-

uscripts, or at least a sufficient number on the topic in question. A rejection may mean that the manuscript is not right for that particular journal, but it might be just what another editor is looking for.

When a manuscript is accepted, the writer would be naive to think that it will pass into print unmarked. An editor's job is to ensure that the writer's meaning is absolutely clear — in short, to make the writer look good. And so good editors ruthlessly cut out extraneous verbiage and tighten prose to improve clarity.

Indeed, most writers, but especially beginning writers, can learn a good deal about writing by comparing their original manuscript with the edited version that appears in print.

The Writer-Mentor Relationship

Many beginning writers benefit from working with a mentor, someone to whom they can turn for advice, someone with a listening ear and a critical eye. Patricia Williams, who directs the Across the University Writing Program at Sam Houston State University, suggests that the beginning writer should approach a colleague who is an accomplished writer. A beginning writer might choose someone who has published in a variety of journals and whose writing style is similar to the style that the beginner is attempting to develop.

Apart from the obvious compliment paid to the mentor, the mentor also has something to gain from the writer-mentor relationship. Because mentors also write, they can benefit from ready access to another set of eyes

for their new manuscripts. Exchanging manuscripts to gain another reader's impressions is a useful strategy. Both beginning and experienced writers can use this informal review process to improve their writing *before* they submit it to an editor, which should enhance their chances for success.

The Writer-Collaborator Relationship

Many writers — beginners and veterans alike — work with collaborators, or co-authors, ranging from one to several. One or two co-authors seems to be the most reasonable number. Collaborating with one or more colleagues to produce an article (or a larger work) has many advantages over solo writing, but it also has some pitfalls. It may be helpful to consider the pros and cons.

The pros include: 1) learning from a collaborating writer, 2) building an effective mutual review process that will improve both writers' work, 3) compounding expertise (one writer's strengths complementing the other's), and 4) being able to produce more publishable manuscripts over a shorter time.

The cons include: 1) conflicts over style and content, 2) difficulty integrating more than one author's writing into a cohesive manuscript, 3) problems coordinating writing schedules and meeting deadlines, and 4) status conflicts when a beginning writer teams with a better-known writer.

Before initiating or agreeing to a collaboration, writers should explore these pros and cons with the potential

partner(s). Many conflicts can be avoided by discussing issues early and setting guidelines for the collaboration.

Support Groups

The last type of writing relationship I want to mention is the support group. Writing support groups can be informal or formal. An informal support group might consist of several colleagues setting aside a few minutes every week or two to discuss whatever current writing they are doing. These sharing sessions can provide opportunities to discuss ideas for articles, sticking points in writing, or writing strategies in general. Participants can share manuscript drafts and brainstorm topics for future writing. One typical activity is the group critique, in which all members of the group read one member's manuscript and offer constructive criticism in the group meeting.

A more formal extension of this type of sharing might be the addition of a topical focus for each meeting. For example, each member of the group might be responsible for presenting a topic so that, over time, all of the members make a formal presentation at some point. Topics might include "How to Choose a Topic," "How to Write a Good Opening Sentence," and so on. Guest speakers — writers, editors — also might be invited to make presentations to the group.

Many writing support groups meet regularly, often once a week, for 30 to 45 minutes. A useful format is the "brown-bag lunch" seminar, which allows participants to squeeze in the support meeting over lunch instead of taking other time during a busy day.

A Final Word and a Few Resources

In this fastback I have touched on key concerns in writing for professional publication. My hope is that these brief notes will be a starting point. They show the way, but they do not show the hard work that is involved in producing a good manuscript. That is something that all writers discover on their own. Even though writing is hard work, it can be very rewarding. Writing is an interesting road and one worth traveling.

I have provided a few signposts on this road. The publications that follow offer a few more. Experienced writers as well as beginners may find them helpful.

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Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation

The Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation was established on 13 October 1966 with the signing, by Dr. George H. Reavis, of the irrevocable trust agreement creating the Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation Trust.

George H. Reavis (1883-1970) entered the education profession after graduating from Warrensburg Missouri State Teachers College in 1906 and the University of Missouri in 1911. He went on to earn an M.A. and a Ph.D. at Columbia University. Dr. Reavis served as Assistant Superintendent of Schools in Maryland and Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh. In 1929 he was appointed director of instruction for the Ohio State Department of Education. But it was as assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction in the Cincinnati public schools (1939-48) that he rose to national prominence.

Dr. Reavis' dream for the Educational Foundation was to make it possible for educators to write and publish the wisdom they acquired through professional activity. He wanted educators and the general public to "better understand the nature of the educative process and the relation of education to human welfare."

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